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The Confines of Time

On the Ebbing Away of Futures in Sierra Leone and Palestine

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The confines of time – on the ebbing away of futures in Sierra Leone and Palestine

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Abstract

This article contributes to an understanding of the existential character of confinement by directing attention to the interlinked concepts of tiredness and foreboding. Through juxtaposition and analysis of material gathered among people whose lives are lived under compromised circumstances in Sierra Leone and Palestine we illuminate the way time - not only space – confines. Our analytical concern is with the way in which futures are anticipated by people confined in space and time, where conditions of possibility are materially and sometimes corporeally suffocating. To anticipate fragile futures, or to mourn futures terminated early is exhausting. Tiredness, from this perspective, is a ubiquitous and overwhelming sentiment suffusing what it means to live in confining sites. It is an expression of foreboding understood as a 'being towards death' (Stevenson 2014).

Keywords: confinement, endurance, foreboding, future, Sierra Leone, Palestine

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> At last the service was over, and they all quietly dispersed, and it was dark and empty again, and there followed that hush which is only known in stations that stand solitary in the open country or in the forest when the wind howls and nothing else is heard and when all the emptiness around, all the dreariness of life slowly ebbing away is felt.
>
> Anton Chekhov, *The Murder* (1919: 89-90)

Introduction

In this article we investigate the analytical potential of a concept of foreboding for understanding experiences of confinement. At the start of *Affliction,* Veena Das (2015) suggests that lives lived under compromised circumstances are often suffused by a sense of foreboding. Our response is to direct attention towards the existential character of confinement, that is, to the ways in which confinement makes itself felt in the texture of relatedness of those confined by poverty and conflict. In what follows, based on ethnographic material from Sierra Leone and Palestine, we juxtapose and analyse material gathered among people whose lives are lived under compromised circumstances, in order to illuminate the way time - not only space – confines. We do so because although we know from prison studies that confinement affects the quality of time in a variety of ways (da Cunha 2008; Medlicott 1999; Moran 2012; Reed 2003; Wahidin 2006), we know relatively little about how time is experienced as confining in less institutionalized sites. By so doing we further qualify the lived experience of stuckness.

The ethnographic insight that led us to foreboding was the discovery of a common expression of tiredness among our interlocutors in two otherwise quite different ethnographic sites. To anticipate fragile futures, or to mourn futures terminated early, we argue, is exhausting. Tiredness in the face of mundane, everyday struggles, we propose, is an expression of foreboding understood as a 'being towards death' (Stevenson 2014). It is our view that tiredness and foreboding are ubiquitous features of human experience that are often overlooked by scholars keen to identify signs of hope, agency or

a redemptive future. Therefore, we argue for the value of attending to the twin themes of tiredness and foreboding to deepen our understanding of experiences of confinement. The novelty of our argument lies in the way we thus qualify theorising about experiences of confinement under circumstances of poverty and conflict not as examples of the 'obstinacy of hope' (Jefferson 2014b) or in terms of the popular trope about the triumph of the human spirit, or even in terms of sustaining belief in spite of it all - what some scholars have referred to as illusio (Allan 2013; Gren 2015; Hage 2015) - but as deeply and inherently infused by a sense of the tragic, revealed as tiredness informed by an embodied experience of foreboding.

An extension of our primary argument is that tiredness is an overwhelming sentiment suffusing what it means to live under confining circumstances, particularly in the confined futures our interlocutors foresee for their children. This latter point gestures to questions related to inheritance and the way futures are forged through kinship (See Das 2014, Chatterjee 2014, Han and Brandel forthcoming; Jensen and Waltorp, this volume). The pressures involved with not being able to forge or perceive a viable future for one's children or one's family make themselves visible through negatively weighted anticipations. What we find is that under circumstances of confinement where time, lived in the shadow of suffering, confines, parents' thoughts of the impending future are not accompanied by hope but by a deeply permeating sense of foreboding for themselves and the relationships of care and obligation they cannot hope to fulfil.

The article is informed by and contributes to ongoing conversations about connections between living and dying in sites of overwhelming poverty and political conflict as represented in the writings of Lisa Stevenson, Veena Das, Clara Han and others (Stevenson 2014; Das: 2007, 2015; Das & Han 2015; Das & Randeria 2015) but is concerned specifically with the temporal experience of confinement. It speaks substantively to central themes raised by the editors of the *Special Issue* in their introduction, with a focus on the kind of orientation toward the future that the enmeshment of stuckness, confinement, tiredness and temporality creates. As such this article also contributes to the anthropological literature

particularly concerned with the temporality of subjective experience in the light of overwhelming social circumstances (cf. Garcia 2008; Munn 1992; Pedersen 2012; Stevenson 2014).

The article is structured as follows. First, some brief remarks on our orientation to the tragic. Second, presentation and preliminary discussion of three episodes from Sierra Leone and Palestine. Third, we bring the material and our analysis into conversation with some of the theoretical insights of Henri Bergson (1910, 1912) and Pierre Bourdieu (2000) and the ethnography of Lisa Stevenson (2014) and further discuss the way time threatens as much as it promises, and tiredness and foreboding feature as constrained orientation toward the future.

'This is what is'

The work of Anton Chekhov, the Russian writer, is characterised by accounts of ordinary human lives where there is neither moral to the story, nor final *denouement*. Rather, the reader is left to make up his or her own mind about the value to be attributed to the characters and the tale itself (Loehlin 2012; Woolf 1925). Chekhov's attunement to lives lived without spectacle or melodrama - always in the shadow of sorrow - resonates with our own experience during fieldwork as the episodes presented below testify. In our research on detention and the collateral damage of imprisonment we have often encountered lives that appear so ordinary as to be unremarkable. There has nonetheless (for us) been something strikingly unshakeable about precisely such ways of living that seem inconsequential, though it has been difficult to pin down exactly what this is. But some encounters stuck with us, got under our skin and demanded our attention. What they seem to share, and what we therefore grapple with in this article, is a basic articulation of tiredness associated with anticipated futures.

So, in a manner aligned with Stevenson's idea of mournfulness that expresses a 'mode of listening to uncertainty' (Allison 2015: 11) this article is attuned to areas of life that reside in the realm of the subdued and neglected. It echoes Elizabeth Povinelli's call to think of confined lives 'defined not by some redemptive future but by the understanding that '*this is what is*' (Povinelli 2009: 528, our emphasis). Like Chekov's work it reflects the ordinarily tragic but with specific reference to tiredness.

We engage with material that has haunted us in different ways, as we attempt to come nearer an understanding of what it means to live a life confined by time. One might say, following Nancy Munn, that our time of writing merges in some senses with the time of our interlocutors through the way their stories have lived with us, and pursued us across time (Munn 1992: 93-94). We present three episodes to exemplify our argument, three encounters from the field. The first involves a burial, the second a visit of condolence, the third a conversation with a mother about her children. Present within each are small signs which, at first, we paid relatively little attention to, but which later came to be pivotal to our analysis. Preempting the presentation and analysis somewhat, these signs are a rude interjection by a friend of the family at a burial, a harsh word from a local stakeholder targeting the ethnographer's newcomer status in a field of violent conflict, and a culturally inappropriate attempt at a compliment by the ethnographer. Each of these signs speak to us, directly or indirectly, about the temporal qualities of confinement.

Ghassan Hage has recommended that social scientists should always be looking for spaces where they are confronted by the 'accessibility of the inaccessible', or put another way for 'spaces that give enough of themselves to tell us that they exist but are nonetheless impervious to easy capture' (Hage 2012: 305). The confounding sense of tiredness felt by our interlocutors in Sierra Leone and Palestine is haunting but at the same time, as Hage notes, it resists easy capture. The difference between our investigation of such difficult to capture aspects of human life and Hage's is that tiredness in our fields has registered in a temporal register rather than a spatial one. How this difference manifests is illustrated in the following ethnographic excerpt from Sierra Leone.

Episode 1

The following material was collected during fieldwork in Sierra Leone – one of the world's least developed nations according to UN statistics[1] - in 2006 as part of a study of detention practices during and after the so-called rebel war (1991-2000). The ethnography included immersion in the country's

[1] UN Human Development Report 2016 (UNDP 2016)

prisons and engagement with prison staff, ex-prisoners and ex-combatants. It was the search for ex-prisoners that initially brought Jefferson to the people and neighbourhood that feature below. The account is based on field notes and told as a first-person narrative. We are in Kroo Bay, one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Sierra Leone's capital city, Freetown.

Isatu was two years old when she died. She was the daughter of one of the men in the camp (the colloquial name given to a small section of the neighbourhood frequented and inhabited by mostly young men and women whose lives can only be characterised in terms of struggle) whom I had begun to get to know. On one occasion during a routine visit to the camp (June 1st) I was summoned to the *front baffa* (sheltered congregating area) where I was shown grotesque photos of the sores on Isatu's small body. They created quite a stir. Somehow the family had managed to keep her illness relatively secret. Her mother began to cry at the reaction of the other women while the father explained how the little girl had been bewitched. He showed photos of her healthy too, keen to get my attention. And he urged me to see her. Her state was much worse than I had imagined. She had a dark 'rash' over almost her whole body, creating a charred appearance. Her shoulders were thin, her legs and feet bloated. Flies flocked around the damp, sticky-looking skin. She was silent and unresponsive.

We discussed the potential cost of treatment by the herbalist. How much would it cost to have the curse lifted? Isatu's father was hesitant to give a figure. I wondered whether this was perhaps because he could not come to terms with there being set a figure on his daughter's life? But at the same time the exchange resembled many exchanges around money and the relationship between benefactor and beneficiary, where the beneficiary 'obliges' the benefactor to determine the size of the contribution themselves. The value of Isatu's life was not the father's dilemma as much as it was mine.

In my field notes that evening I noted that during this discussion the father began to cry, a premonition of the grief to come and I tried to make some sense of his experience and my own. I wrote:

> I am not sure they really hold out much hope. The herbalist is the last resort. They need to try. I am sceptical of the herbalist's powers but supporting them in their own wishes is also a way of showing care. It is likely too late for the girl anyway. But what will we say she died of? Poverty? Ignorance? Witch sickness? A curse? 'Who would curse a two-year old? What harm has she done anyone'? asked Salim...

By the next day Isatu was dead and, by chance, I joined the funeral procession as the men (no women - the mother left weeping in the camp) marched through the neighbourhood to the graveyard led by Isatu's father carrying her wrapped in a prayer mat held in his arms. The procession led to a cemetery behind the refuse site. A grave had been dug no more than 1 ½ metres deep. We gathered round as a bundle of white cloth was unwrapped from the mat and the mat lain in the shallow grave. The knots binding the white cloth were undone, the cloth left loosely wrapped around the body. A pillow made from earth was formed and the body of Isatu laid in the grave. Wooden sticks were placed crosswise protecting the body from the wads of grass pulled up from the edge of the graveyard and placed on top by her father. Earth was shovelled on top of the grass by gravediggers and carefully patted into a mound with a smooth surface. A flower or at least a stem and some leaves were lodged in the earth. Isatu's father addressed the grave: 'Take action now. Come back to me in three days. Take action' he supplicated, this being his only audible expression of grief. Muslim prayers spoken in a trance-like rhythm followed, the men standing, palms upraised, around the grave. When the prayers were over the group dispersed from the graveside and began the stroll back to Kroo Bay. The urgency of the ritual had dissipated. Back at the camp we returned to our default positions, hanging out in the *baffa* where a discussion raged about the cause of Isatu's death. Salim reported she had passed a big maggot in her stool. It sounded as though worms were vying with witchcraft for explanatory ascendancy. The underlying question seemed to be what makes the most sense of death in a context where witchcraft is not uncommon.

One incident is omitted from the narrative of the burial above that is worth dwelling on. It is an incident that disrupts in some way the smooth, though sorrowful, account above.

As I observed and participated in the burial I became increasingly aware of my irritation at the behaviour of one of the camp dwellers. Either high or drunk, as quite often, his restlessness and general demeanour struck me as disrespectful. At one point he came up behind me and loudly declared, apparently for my benefit, 'I too want to die; I am so tired.' I recall feeling annoyed by this, as if it undermined the seriousness and the finality of the death we were still mourning. As a speech act I did not quite believe it; its delivery with exaggerated force seemed overdone. But what if these words are conceived of less as liquor or drug-induced performance and more as called forth by the circumstances themselves, an expression not only of this young man's sense of exhaustion with living but also of the broader community's?

Field notes typically have at least three functions: they serve as a record of experience, transforming material into data; they register the early sense-making efforts of the note-taker; and they enable some early processing of the events in which the ethnographer is immersed and his/her early reactions to these. The above excerpts, and indeed those that follow later, reveal these features. The note-taker's struggle to make sense of life (and its value) and death in the neighbourhood as well as the form an expression of care might take, is co-present with the record of the struggle of the family and friends to deal with their loss and its precursors. The aftermath of the burial is characterised as dissipated urgency implying a flattening of affect as we walked back to the camp to continue simply hanging-out, though on this occasion preoccupied with discussing the cause of the death. And the potential significance of tiredness is registered. The linking of tiredness with death (particularly we suggest the death of a child) is noteworthy. This is not an exhaustion borne out of too much activity, of excessive labour; it is a tiredness borne of survival, of hustling, of waiting, of hanging out, of scraping a living from one moment to the next, but for what and for whom? Another key informant from the camp, whom I knew well, spoke often of tiredness; at times his mood was highly morose, bordering

on suicidal. For him, every day was a new day of hustling, a new day of hoping for some elusive windfall that might keep the foreboding of death, and the reminder of finitude at a distance. Yet, often countering this moroseness (but sometimes, under conditions of ill-health or missing school fees, also reproducing it) was an obvious and active commitment to the welfare, education and future of his two sons.

Our first episode is concerned with conditions of contemporary poverty; our second and third concern conditions of contemporary conflict. All three feature the intertwining of experiences of spatial and temporal stuckness. While our field sites differ with respect to location, cosmology, relative standard of living and many dimensions besides, what emerges as a potentially universal thread is the significance of tiredness. We turn now to Palestine and the material of Segal to make this case. Our point is not to make systematic comparison but through juxtaposition of common experiences in such diverse sites to demonstrate the significance of tiredness and foreboding as forms of life.

Episode 2

In social science analysis Palestine is often likened to a prison due to the complex and conjoining policies of restricted mobility for the Palestinians living in these areas (Bishara 2015a, 2015b; Meari 2014). To be confined is an aspect of ordinary life for Palestinians, revealed for example, in everyday choices about which routes to take to work, to visit family or go to the hospital (Kelly 2006). Confinement, however, defines the Palestinians' situation in a further sense, namely through the well-known 'prisoners' problem', that is, the more than 700,000 Palestinians who have, since the beginning of Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands, been incarcerated in Israeli prisons (Meari 2014, Segal 2016a). Confinement in the context of Palestine is thus part of the collective experience of being occupied; it is built into landscapes and infrastructure (Bisharah 2015a, 2015b). Even in this context, confinement seems to cling with semantic density to one specific site, namely the Gaza strip. With its 356 km^2 and a population of 1,850,000 Palestinians, the Gaza Strip is in local vernacular often named 'the world's largest prison'. With this background we will use the following episode from the Gaza strip

to help conceptualise the experience of confinement in terms of the interlacing of spatial and temporal stuckness.

During the summer of 2014 the state of Israel launched operation *Protective Edge* in the Gaza Strip, in response to Hamas' alleged kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers. In fact, Hamas did not kidnap, nor kill, the Israeli teenagers. Operation Protective Edge saw the killing of 2104 Palestinians as well as 72 Israeli citizens during fifty days of intense warfare between the Israel Defence Force and Hamas (Btselem 2015). The global media witnessed intense circulation of images of people and houses in pieces, UN staff crying and devastated orphans standing alone in demolished neighbourhoods. The images were, naturally, disturbing and for someone familiar with Palestine, the people, and the roads bombed, they were devastating. But, as an ethnographer studying the braiding of kinship, imprisonment and martyrdom in Palestine since 2004 I was no stranger to the way in which death and indeed dying is a familiar part of the horizon of expectations for both individuals and the collective of Palestinians (Allen 2013, Segal 2016).

And yet, among the uncountable images documenting how Israel's occupation of Palestine affects the Palestinians one photo taken during operation Protective Edge kept haunting me. This is a specific image featuring a girl around the age of seven, her face wrecked with tears streaming down her cheeks. In the background we glimpse tiles from what would appear to be an operating theatre. The affect transpiring from the image is that of a child devastated from witnessing something deeply unsettling. Given the extent of the death toll of Israel's fifty days of war on Gaza the interpretation made by the viewer is that she has lost someone dear to her. There are many reasons why this photo in particular felt, and still feels unshakable to me. Primarily, many years of engagement with Palestinians lead me to suspect that, for the girl, consolation was out of reach. When the war terminated, an article featured in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* written by a journalist who had interviewed the family of the girl. The article described how the girl had witnessed her father being violently wounded and had not spoken since. Why would I assume she might be inconsolable? Mourning, claims Freud, has a timeliness to it that involves life being slowly re-inhabited, piece by

piece (Freud 1957]; Garcia 2008; Segal 2016b). The enduring condition of military occupation of Palestine means that everyday life for Palestinians is experienced as just as corrosive and frightening as large-scale events of warfare due to the way in which the occupation is built into the social fabric of the Palestinian community (Segal 2016a). Given this background a process of mourning in Palestine can be likened to the structure of melancholic mourning where the attachment to that which is lost is constantly re-evoked rather than receding into the background as assumed in the linear and increasingly contested theory of regular mourning evoked by Freud (Segal 2016b).

Looking at the photo of this particular girl brought me back to a suffocatingly warm day in Rafah, Gaza in 2004. I had been fortunate to attain a study trip to the Gaza strip under the auspices of the late Dr Eyad Sarraj's Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) and the Danish organization RCT – Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims (now DIGNITY). I stayed with an employee of the centre in her paternal household and joined the programme's therapists in meetings and outreach visits to clients. One such outreach visit took place with a young, highly educated and respected clinical psychologist, Esmail. We drove from the posh Rimal area in Gaza city where the headquarters of GCMHP is located to the dirt roads of Rafah near the border with Egypt. The visit to Gaza took place two months after Israel had created a so-called buffer zone right up to the Egyptian border in preparation for the upcoming disengagement of the illegal Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip. Practically this meant an act of bulldozing the homes of Rafah Camp's inhabitants whose houses were deemed to be too close to the border, perceived to be too much of a security threat to the Israeli state. In tandem with house demolitions, shelling and sniper killings by air had helped create the now strikingly barren strip of sand between Rafah camp and the fences facing Egypt. Our driver parked the car right where inhabitation started next to the buffer zone. Esmail and I looked for the family's house we were visiting. He had briefed me that we would meet a family who had just lost their young child to an airstrike. As is a common feature of the aesthetics of ornamentation and politics in Palestinian public space, posters featuring a dead girl hang throughout the street. 'It's her', Esmail remarked and buzzed the door of the bereaved family. I remember nausea. I remember working hard

to stay in the living room, listening to the bereaved mother and the siblings quietly crying. What stays with me too is the therapist's demeanour. He listened and offered his condolences but he too struggled to contain the devastation of the family. Midway through our visit an Israeli helicopter started shelling the camp close to the house, which compelled us to leave before the therapeutic session, or visit of condolence was brought to a close. On our way back, we were quiet. At the checkpoint between Khan Younis and Gaza Israeli soldiers shot in our direction. When we got back to the office the head of one of the sections laughed at me and said, 'I see you got a taste of Gaza'. Later he apologized.

The visit to this particular girl's bereaved family was a first for me, yet many such encounters were to come (see Allen 2009, 2013; Segal 2015). The exclamation 'I see you got a taste of Gaza' was meant as an acknowledgement that now the foreign student knew what Gaza was about. As I came to realize many years on, however, the director's comment was also an invitation to acknowledge that every Palestinian lives with what in Hage's term is 'inaccessible' to people who have not had a 'taste of Gaza'. This means acknowledging that the process of grieving for the violently deceased girl in Rafah camp, and indeed for any one of the deaths caused by the occupation is an enduring process, punctuated rather than put to rest by new wars and instances of shelling that hamper any attempt to 'move on', the call for which so often accompanies studies of conflict and mass violence (Brudholm 2008:5). It is in this way that time confines. Not by closing down or setting limits but by a reverse process of endlessness and open-endedness. But this is not an open-endedness associated with opportunity, choice or freedom; rather it is an open-endedness associated with inevitable and exhausting struggle – also at the level of the mundane and everyday.

One aspect of working as an ethnographer in and of Palestine is that the shock and sorrow of being familiar with that genre of knowledge (if this is indeed a particular genre) sometimes too easily overshadows how apparently mundane life concerns can exert as harsh a form of pressure on living as dying, as illustrated by the following episode.

Episode 3

Freckles and a wheelchair

Another dusty camp. Steep stairways to reach the particular alleyway of the family. Hot. The sharpness of sunlight on a Friday morning. The neighborhood is quiet and seems to distil a sense of Friday tranquility that comes with people not going to work, contemplating or at least just lingering for an hour longer inside the houses. My assistant Maysoon is on the phone with Ibtisam in order for us to track down their house. A young boy joins us and leads us toward Ibtisam's house. Further into the neighbourhood a boy around ten in a wheelchair greets us. The other boy says, 'this is their son'. We greet the son of Ibtisam who follows us in his wheelchair. He does not want any help to get to his house. Inside we are welcomed by Ibtisam's husband who has been released from yet another stint of administrative detention on the grounds of subversive politics. He invites us to sit in the living room. After a while Ibtisam joins us whilst serving us a soft drink. We make conversation asking about the names of all the children. They have all been named after important figures of the Quran. 'You are asking for trouble', Maysoon says. 'They (Israel) know your politics by the names of your children'. The ex-prisoner, Ibtisam's husband is clearly uneasy about our visit, which was negotiated through an Israeli NGO working with allegations of torture by the Israel Defence Force. I am there to talk with his wife but also want to acknowledge his experience of imprisonment. I manage to ask how he thinks his multiple absences have affected the household. He replies that he is probably not as tough on the children as he should be. He cannot make himself be that strict. His phone keeps ringing, and finally a cousin stops by and he asks if he can be excused, if we are okay to talk just with his wife. Since that was always my hope I answer yes. Ibtisam seems a little more relaxed now. Next to her sits her daughter, a smiley girl around eleven. With freckles. 'You are like me', I say, to which she smiles awkwardly. Ibtisam sighs and says 'you are here to talk about my husband's imprisonment. That was hard, he is out now. Thanks to God. If you want to know what is hard look at my children. I do not know what to do with her. To us freckles are not pretty. We got a prescription by the doctor in order to make them less visible, but they still show. Then there is Mohammad. Come here', she says to him.

He rolls up to us in his chair. 'He does not speak but he can. He has emotional problems, he gets very angry and it is hard to calm him down', she says, 'but his head is alright'.

As our conversation proceeds I allow myself to attune to that with which Ibtisam is preoccupied. It is not the imprisonment of her husband, neither past nor anticipated, that exerts pressure on the family. Rather, it is the future lives of her freckled daughter and disabled son. She, her community as well as I, knew that no amount of whitening cream would turn her daughter into a first-choice spouse. Ibtisam was at risk of having to settle her daughter's eventual marriage with a partner who may himself be at some personal or social disadvantage. This was doubly painful given the fact that her son's physical disability would most likely never allow marriage. As such, already by the age of ten the coordinates were laid out for a dire future socially and economically for his parents and siblings. Witnessing how for Ibtisam there was no difference in the anguish caused by her daughter's freckles and her son's disability confirmed the pertinence of children regarding the sense of hope, or despair, for the future they embody (Das 2015; Han and Brandel forthcoming). No matter her motherly affection for these children, deviancy even in the disguise of freckles poses a challenge to the aspirations she holds on behalf of her family. The time I spent with Ibtisam and her family brought out strongly how life during occupation allows even subtle marks like slight disability and freckles to become a threat worse than yet another stint of fatherly absence, or perhaps even death. Whereas disability globally is often a cause for distress and stigmatization (Gammeltoft 2008; 2013; Das 2015), Israel's occupation of Palestine, can be thought of as making a difference to the intensity with which such distress is experienced, not unlike the tightening of a screw (see Segal 2016a[2]). We turn now to consider in more depth what these stories of death, bereavement, and exhausted and exhausting futures in Palestine and Sierra Leone might teach us about the temporalities of confinement.

Foreboding

[2] See also Crewe (2011) on 'tightness' as a metaphor for the experience of incarceration.

If Jefferson's case is about tiredness and death; Segal's first is mostly about mourning and the second is about futures. Each case features endings that are simultaneously continuous. All feature children. Discussions in the *baffa* focused on causes of death. The conversation with the disabled son / freckled girl's mother focused on threats one lives with as the tapestry of the everyday. To make sense of the experiences of tiredness across the two fields we propose the notion of foreboding. Foreboding is not only fear of the unknown but fear of the known. This includes fear of unpredictable but all too familiar deaths caused by parasites, witchcraft and helicopters but also fears that ordinary life course events such as marriage might be out of reach for the next generation. As such foreboding involves a reading of signs, extraordinary and familiar alike, signs that gesture towards the interlacing of living and dying. As such we take foreboding to be a 'being towards dying' that is integral to living under conditions of stuckness in confining sites (Stevenson 2014).

We believe the episodes described above help shed light on the way in which temporality is brought out and experienced in sites of confinement. As demonstrated in Jefferson's narrative of Isatu's last days, death affects the trajectory of the whole family. And in Gaza each of the inconsolable relatives of the girl killed during the helicopter raid are propelled onward in life partially through their past experience of living with and now without the girl. Inter-generational relations are perhaps one of the clearest examples of how relationships are invested with temporality in the sense that children provide a vicarious outlet for the dreams of parents (Whyte et. al 2014). And futures - good and bad - are anticipated on behalf of children, thus underlining how the temporality of the singular is always already inscribed in the temporality of kinship both structurally and in the lived relatedness of a kinship group (Carstens 2000; Munn 1992). We can ask what kind of futures parents aspire to for their children under conditions of abject poverty or permanent violence (Das & Randeira 2015; Appadurai 2004). Or what obligations are put on shared time by continuously compromised circumstances. Ebu said he wanted to die. He was tired. He was apparently sick of relations. If the 'elasticity of time' (Jefferson 2014a) means that time limits as much by its infinite scope and endlessness as by attempts to control time

(clocks, calendars, schedules and so on) or control others' time (through the imposition of routines, incarceration and so on) our observations remind us that such efforts are constituted in and of the everyday (Munn 1992: 104). For us to better understand the way time threatens as much as it promises across our material, we turn now to Bourdieu and Bergson, and engage with some ethnographic material analysed by Stevenson.

For some there is never enough time. For others there is too much. This is something Bourdieu draws attention to in the final chapter of *Pascalian Meditations*. Amid multiple references to the ultimate stakes of life and death and analytical perspectives on power and social existence Bourdieu evokes the 'resignation' of the dominated. Via an exegesis of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* he illustrates the 'extorted complicity of the victim' (Bourdieu 2000: 231) who is obliged to invest in the 'game' the rules of which are not in any way fair. He shows how investing in an absurd, uncertain world is in many cases a condition of one's own domination. He qualifies the experience of lacking a future as a 'modal experience' (Bourdieu 2000: 234) implying that such a lack situates a person in specific ways on the axis between possibility and necessity, between what might be feasible and what is given. This tragic orientation is echoed in our ethnographic material, thereby hinging our studies to a temporal rather than a spatial register. This necessitates a shift to thinking about confinement in temporal as well as spatial terms. Matt Hodges and others, (see Segal 2013; Pedersen 2012) turn to Bergson to be able to think about the working of temporality. Bergson's idea of duration, as a condition of human experience that contracts and dilates pulsatingly is useful in this regard. Contraction involves the entirety of existence where past, present and future are actualised simultaneously in a particular moment. Dilation, on the other hand, refers to that which Bergson terms the virtual, namely the stream of potentiality that has not yet, but at the same time has already, been actualized (Hodges 2008; Deleuze 1988; Bergson 1910). In Gilles Deleuze's words 'the virtual is (therefore) real without being actual, ideal without being abstract' (Deleuze 1994: 264). It is pertinent to understand that it is the virtual that allows for actualisation, not the virtual that is actualised. Albeit derived from different epistemologies these ideas of the work of time offer ways to think further about how time for our interlocutors

pulsates in an unpredictable fashion between threat and promise. The immanence of the past in the present and the imperceptibility of any specific future except the one that seems overdetermined by present poverty or violence (or both) leaves people strung out, stretched and possibly even 'unhinged'[3]. Lisa Stevenson's book *Life Beside Itself* (2014) is evocative in this regard. Stevenson carves out understandings of how life, death and language are connected and what it means to 'cooperate in survival' (Stevenson 2014: 70). Examining the historical practice of removing Inuit sufferers of TB from their homes in the far north of Canada and transporting them to sanatoria in the south and the work of contemporary suicide prevention helplines, she explores how an indifferent, anonymous form of sociality can be reconciled with 'the sociality of Inuit communities in which one's very life depends on being given the name of someone who has recently died' (Stevenson 2014: 107), that is a form of sociality that is radically integrative – crossing even the threshold between life and death. Usefully, she is also attentive to the theme of exhaustion as an articulation of stuckness as exemplified in the following reflection on the typical response to hearing about an Inuit suicide, that being "Oh, I wish we had known. I wish he had said something."

> 'But usually it isn't that he never said anything but that he was always saying it, and that the saying turned into a drone, which had *no meaning except exhaustion*, which became the *background of life*. It's not that we never knew, it's that we always knew, and so it didn't seem important.' (2014: 100, our emphasis).

Two things are noteworthy here. First, the reference to words becoming a drone that meant exhaustion. It is ambiguous to whom this meant exhaustion. Was it the speaker or the listener? Second, this drone, this exhaustion became the 'background of life', a kind of white noise, default, aural context that for the listener goes unheard and for the speaker is spoken as if to no-one. Such a characterization aptly captures the circumstances of stuckness we have encountered and discussed above. It also

[3] 'Unhinged' is a favourite term of Lisa Guenther (2013) who has applied insights from what she calls critical phenomenology to the experience of solitary confinement under supermax prison conditions in the USA.

resonates with the way the episodes shared above had pursued us without it being immediately clear as to why, reflecting perhaps a paradoxical sense that we did not know but always knew.

We can further ask what work the term exhaustion is doing for Stevenson here and how it might help us make sense of how our interlocutors in Sierra Leone and Palestine experienced 'being toward dying'. There too we found a drone of monotony reflecting tiredness. Recall Ebu's words 'I want to die too, I am so tired' and Ibtisam's sigh whilst glancing toward her children. Later in her book Stevenson casts further light on the interrelation between exhaustion and death. She reports one of her encounters with a 'bored' Inuit youth whose desire to die she is later confronted by. '…for now I have no answer to her boredom, just as later I will have no answer for her desire to die. It seems implacable, her exhaustion with the 'real' (Stevenson 2014: 129). And further in relation to the boredom common to many accounts of waiting and stuckness (see Bandak & Janeja 2018; Jensen 2014; Khosravi 2017; Frederiksen 2018), she asks 'Are the legions of bored Inuit youth really avoiding escape, or are all escape routes foreclosed? Might the real problem not be that boredom bends toward death? That none of us can escape?' (Stevenson 2014: 130). This bending toward inescapable death is what we propose can be thought of as foreboding.

Returning to Bourdieu, there are many resonances in his account with the experience of our interlocutors. He speaks of people 'condemned to uncertainty' of 'arbitrariness as a principle of the ordering of things'. But perhaps most useful for our purposes is his characterisation of temporal experience as 'immediate investment in the forthcoming of the world' (Bourdieu 2000: 225). People are implicated, invested in (not by choice) the coming forth of the worlds they occupy. Scholars working in this tradition, in particularly Diana Allan (2013), Nina Gren (2015) and Ghassan Hage (2015) have evoked how this investment takes the shape of illusio, of sustaining belief 'against all odds'. In combination with Stevenson who points us towards the significance of death for life – this notion of investment in forthcoming offers a point of contact to the notion of foreboding. Bringing forth in the sense of illusio involves some imaginative work about what is being brought forth, some conscious

investment in world-making. Yet, akin to the move made by Cheryl Mattingly (2017) in her thoughtful piece in this journal where she was invited to think about her material on violence through Marquis de Sade's work on pleasure, our material on life under compromised conditions of more or less permanent violence or poverty compels us to ask whether this calling forth can ever avoid being pre-empted by a dystopian foreboding? Foreboding involves fear and anxiety. It is a reflection of discomfort in the face of a future which is not, and fails to be imagined as, good. The presence of tiredness in the lives of our interlocuters in Sierra Leone and Palestine signals not the imaginative force of illusio but an anticipation of an inevitable future where the odds are so loaded as to undermine any (or almost any) possibility of being against them. This, we have argued, is foreboding, a way of being where living is simultaneous with dying and the future exhausts time.

Conclusion

We have identified tiredness and foreboding as central features of lived experience in compromised circumstances worthy of further empirical and analytic work by anthropologists. The initial quote by Chekhov referred to the hush, the emptiness, the slow 'ebbing away' of dreary life. Paying attention to the ebbing out of life, to exhaustion and foreboding is not without risk[4]. But, we suggest it is worthwhile and necessary. Attending to such times and places of 'ebbing away' in Sierra Leone and Palestine respectively, has compelled us to rethink the kinds of pressures that occur in situations where it is temporality as well as space that is confined and confining. As argued by anthropologists working in fields suffused and conditioned by long term oppression, often in the shape of colonialism and conflict (Segal 2016a, 2016b; Garcia 2008; Stevenson 2014) we end on a note suggesting that situations of sorrow that do not allow the afflicted to move on, as in the situations described here, are times in which the clock has stopped running and where affliction is built into the infrastructure of the ordinary. Suffering is not an extra burden. Suffering is life itself (Jefferson 2014a). An orientation toward such

[4] Stevenson, for example, notes how she risks being accused of being against life because she theorizes death as a kind of meaningful investment in the future, not simply a bitter and final ending. Segal is also often challenged about what such an analysis does to the ethics and politics of researching Palestine.

times involves and evokes an attunement to grief and to situations where living and dying literally go hand in hand[5].

In summary, our analytical concern has been with the way in which futures are anticipated by people confined in space and time, where conditions of possibility are materially and sometimes corporeally suffocating. What futures are on offer or can be seized? And what is possible where the stakes are regularly ultimate? Our ethnographic response has been to show that a sense of foreboding prefigures ideas of the future held by members of afflicted communities in Sierra Leone and the trapped Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. It is through this sense of foreboding that confining temporalities are worked into human experience. We emphasise the value and the necessity of attending to such indeterminate yet suffocating temporalities; to the all too ordinary affliction of people whose circumstances only feature residually in body counts and poverty statistics. As we have shown such attention compels us to consider what people themselves experience as the confining features of their lives. Taking up the still pertinent invitation of Munn (1992) we have shown the way in which stuckness is temporalised in our fieldsites. In these sites, anticipation is literally exhausting; it becomes foreboding. Foreboding registers experientially as tiredness and becomes itself constitutive of living and dying in confined sites and through confining trajectories.

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[5] See Das and Han (2015) for an elaborate discussion of the braiding of living and dying.

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